Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 21 Number 12 December 2024

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, December 01, 2024, 6.30AM: Ananthagiri Hills, Vikarabad. Meeting Point(s): NMDC Main Gate, Mehdipatnam, 05:20AM; Telangana State Police Academy, Chilkur Balaji Temple Road, 05:40AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 99858-07186).

Ananthagiri Hills is a picturesque and ecologically rich area known for its diverse flora, fauna, and scenic landscapes. Situated near Vikarabad, the Ananthagiri Hills forest area forms part of a larger bio-geographically significant region that includes the Nallamala Hills and other parts of the Eastern Ghats. The Ananthagiri Hills forest has a mix of tropical dry deciduous and semi-evergreen forests. The varied landscape, with rolling hills, deep valleys, grasslands and fast-flowing streams, provides a perfect habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Home to a vast array of plant species, including tropical trees such as teak, bamboo, tamarind, *neem*, and *mahua*, along with medicinal plants, shrubs, and flowering plants, the area is also rich in various species of ferns and orchids. The forest is a biodiversity hotspot, particularly known for its vibrant birdlife; a wide variety of bird species, including flycatchers, warblers and woodpeckers, are frequently observed in the area. Many common woodland birds along with migratory birds also visit the region during the cooler months, further adding to its avian diversity. Ananthagiri Hills has a rich bird list of more than 260 species (as per eBird).

FIELD TRIP-2: Sunday, December 15, 2024, 06.45AM: Mrugavani National Park, Chilkur. Meeting Point(s): NMDC Bus Stop, Mehdipatnam, 06:15AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 97388-40070)

Spread over 850 acres, Mrugavani National Park falls in Moinabad Mandal, Ranga Reddy District, and is about 25 km from Hyderabad city. The Park is home to a wide array of animals, birds and butterflies and boasts of a rich avifauna. and is home to a lot of woodland birds. Keep a lookout for the Asian Paradise-flycatcher and other scrub forest birds. The Blue-faced Malkoha and the Pied Crested Cuckoo are also often seen here.

Both trips will be half-day trips, so carry adequate water and breakfast/snacks, and protective gear if required. Covid protocols will be followed; please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. New Deccan Birders hats and caps will be available for purchase; please carry adequate cash.

ASIAN WATERFOWL CENSUS (AWC): From December 20, 2024 to February 06, 2025. Coordinator(s): Humayun Taher (humayun.taher@gmail.com), Gowthama Poludasu (iamgowthama@live.com), Srikanth Bhamidipati (bhamidsrikanth@gmail.com)

For details, please refer to the announcement sent to all members by email. Interested members may register for the survey at the following link: https://forms.gle/J1V1BgZZP7reCvCBA

We wish all our members a very happy New Year 2025

Trip Report: Manjeera Reservoir & WLS, November 17, 2024

Raabiah Arastu

Clamorous Reed Warbler (Photo: Asif Husain Arastu)

I wanted a short break from my daily routine and studies as it was a Sunday and I could not think of anything better than tagging along with my father, Asif Husain Arastu, for a birding trip with Deccan Birders to Manjeera Reservoir.

It was a small refreshment for me as nature is always healing.

The weather was chilly and pleasant, the group had gathered at the backwaters of the Manjeera Dam and that was where the maximum number of birds were spotted – so many different species were seen. In the end the total number of bird species spotted by the group was more than 80 species.

We stayed there for several hours as we walked around and enjoyed the tranquil beauty of nature and the bird calls in the background. It was exactly what I needed!

The bird of the day for me was the Red Avadavat. It was red and covered in white spots with dark wings and tail with a red beak, and was building a nest. Adnanbhai took a great shot of the Red Avadavat with its nesting material.

Bronze-winged Jacana immature (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

I saw a Blue-faced Malkoha. It had a long tail and it was grey and black in colour with a pale blue eye ring and ivory-coloured bill. Some members in the group saw two!

Blue-faced Malkoha (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Eurasian Coot (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

I also saw a Eurasian Coot and a Eurasian Moorhen in the water. A River Tern, flying around, had a full black cap, pale grey wings and a yellow beak.

Grey-headed Swamphen (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

I also saw a Little Grebe, which was fairly common. It was dark overall with a rusty head and neck. The Purple-rumped Sunbird was really beautiful with the sun shining on it, and was very colourful. It had a green metallic crown with a dark brown body and lemon yellow underparts. The Ashy Prinia was an energetic bird with a black bill, pale cinnamon underparts, a grey head and a brownish-grey back.

Purple Heron (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Grey Heron (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Many other birds were also seen: Grey and Purple Herons, Glossy Ibis, Baya Weaver, Brahminy and Indian Pied Starlings, and the beautiful Tricoloured Munias.

Brahminy Starling (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Indian Pied Starling (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Tricoloured Munia (Photo: Mohammed Ali Hyder)

Finally my favourite, the Common Kingfisher – the little bird, of blue and orange colour and a long pointed bill, flying over the water – and also the White-throated Kingfisher, with its electric blue-black wings, red bill and patches on the throat. The blue colour of its wings were shining gorgeously in the sunlight.

We had spent most of our time at the backwaters and it was fun. As it started getting late, to wrap it up the team had *chai* and talked about all the birds they had spotted. It was a tiring yet great day.

It is a thought how people go on a leisure trip or when they enjoy nature they do not notice the number of different birds surrounding them. These birding trips make you realize how beautiful and different each bird and its call is – even our morning starts with the calls of different birds, but we just never appreciate and realize how birds contribute in our daily lives and make it lively with their sweet calls.

There are so many different species of birds around the world of different shades and colours… if one colour or feature is identified incorrectly then the complete bird species changes.

No creature in this world is made useless, every little creature has its own use and benefit for something or the other, and birds do too.

The list of birds seen during the trip:

S. No	Species	Scientific Name	S. No	Species	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	*Dendrocygna javanica*	42	Spotted Owlet	*Athene brama*
2	Knob-billed Duck	*Sarkidiornis melanotos*	43	Indian Grey Hornbill	*Ocyceros birostris*
3	Ruddy Shelduck	*Tadorna ferruginea*	44	Asian Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
4	Garganey	*Spatula querquedula*	45	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	*Merops philippinus*
5	Indian Spot-billed Duck	*Anas poecilorhyncha*	46	Common Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*
6	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	47	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
7	Grey Francolin	*Ortygornis pondicerianus*	48	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
8	Laughing Dove	*Spilopelia senegalensis*	49	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*
9	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	*Treron phoenicopterus*	50	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*
10	Greater Coucal (Southern)	*Centropus sinensis*	51	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*
11	Blue-faced Malkoha	*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*	52	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*
12	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	53	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*
13	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	*Cacomantis passerinus*	54	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*
14	Eurasian Moorhen	*Gallinula chloropus*	55	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*
15	Eurasian Coot	*Fulica atra*	56	Blyth's Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus dumetorum*
16	Grey-headed Swamphen	*Porphyrio poliocephalus*	57	Clamorous Reed Warbler	*Acrocephalus stentoreus*
17	Little Ringed Plover	*Thinornis dubius*	58	Common Grasshopper Warbler	*Locustella naevia*
18	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*	59	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*
19	Pheasant-tailed Jacana	*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*	60	Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
20	Bronze-winged Jacana	*Metopidius indicus*	61	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
21	Common Snipe	*Gallinago gallinago*	62	Rosy Starling	*Pastor roseus*
22	Wood Sandpiper	*Tringa glareola*	63	Indian Pied Starling	*Gracupica contra*
23	River Tern	*Sterna aurantia*	64	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
24	Little Grebe	*Tachybaptus ruficollis*	65	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
25	Asian Openbill	*Anastomus oscitans*	66	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
26	Painted Stork	*Mycteria leucocephala*	67	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	*Cyornis tickelliae*
27	Oriental Darter	*Anhinga melanogaster*	68	Bluethroat	*Luscinia svecica*
28	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	69	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
29	Indian Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*	70	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
30	Little Cormorant	*Microcarbo niger*	71	Streaked Weaver	*Ploceus manyar*
31	Glossy Ibis	*Plegadis falcinellus*	72	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
32	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*	73	Black-breasted Weaver	*Ploceus benghalensis*
33	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*	74	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
34	Eastern Cattle Egret	*Ardea coromanda*	75	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
35	Great Egret	*Ardea alba*	76	Tricolored Munia	*Lonchura malacca*
36	Grey Heron	*Ardea cinerea*	77	Red Avadavat	*Amandava amandava*
37	Purple Heron	*Ardea purpurea*	78	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus*
38	Oriental Honey-buzzard	*Pernis ptilorhynchus*	79	Forest Wagtail	*Dendronanthus indicus*
39	Short-toed Snake Eagle	*Circaetus gallicus*	80	Citrine Wagtail	*Motacilla citreola*
40	Shikra	*Tachyspiza badia*	81	Paddyfield Pipit	*Anthus rufulus*
41	Western Marsh Harrier	*Circus aeruginosus*			

Editor's Note: One of the highlights of the trip was the sighting of a hepatic Grey-bellied Cuckoo. A note on the sighting follows.

A note from a beginner birder

Text & Photo: Dr C R Sundaresan

Grey-bellied Cuckoo hepatic morph

I was taking in the sky and the terrain on one side of the lake when a splash of brilliant colour on a dry branch caught my eye. The cloudless azure blue sky was a striking background enhancing the bird. I was seeing this bird for the first time, and was charmed by the exquisite colours – it was a blend of reddish brown and black. It was brilliantly lit by the rising sun with not a shadow on it. Its perch on a dry branch eliminated all clutter, and the blue of the sky gave a good contrast.

Thanking my good fortune, I quickly captured it digitally. Given that the perch was in deep water, there was no scope for me to capture from different angles, but luckily there was no need, as the view was entirely satisfying.

I bent to review the frames and looked up. The bird had flown away! Eventually I learnt it was a Grey-bellied Cuckoo. I read the description of the bird and found that this was the 'hepatic' variant. Indeed the ginger-orange tone imparted the colour of the liver to the bird. The comparison was apt.

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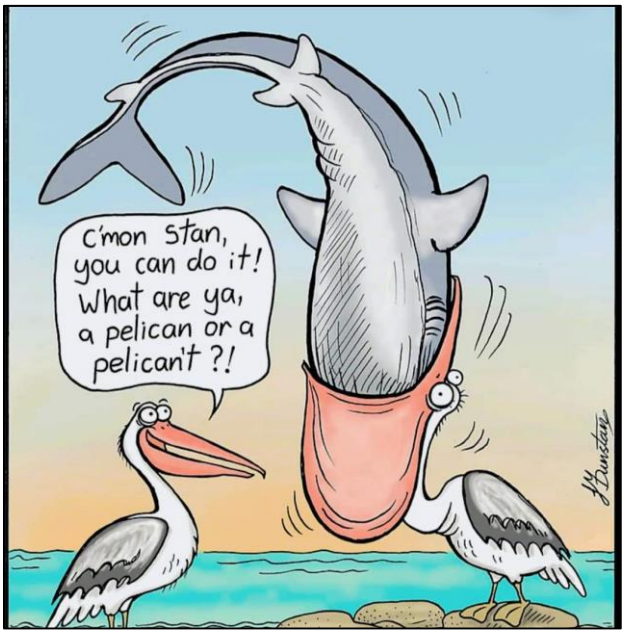
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(Received on WhatsApp, February 4, 2024)

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A JOURNEY TO LEH: EXPLORING BIRDS AND STARS

Trip Report: Ladakh, June 30 – July 06, 2024

Text & Photos: Vikram Penmetsa

Red-fronted Serin

Pre-Departure Preparations

Having experienced the majestic landscapes and rich biodiversity of Leh, during our previous trip to Ladakh organised by Umesh in June 2022, I was eager to plan another trip. This time, the journey was primarily for my son Prithvi, who had just completed his Intermediate studies and developed a keen interest in astrophotography. To combine his newfound passion with our shared love for birding, we decided on a Ladakh trip. We reached out to the same person who had planned our last trip, Mr Lobzang. After finalizing our itinerary with him and booking our tickets early to get cheaper fares, we were set for our adventure.

I made elaborate arrangements for the cold climate at Leh, based on my past experience in 2022. We packed jackets, thermal wear and, as it was the first trip for Prithvi, I carried body warmers just to keep him warm in case he could not take the cold climate.

On June 29, 2024, we set out on our journey from Hyderabad to Delhi and then to Leh early the next morning.

Day 1: June 30, 2024 – Arrival at Leh

We boarded our early morning flight from Delhi to Leh, departing at 04:55AM and arriving at Leh KBR Airport at 06:15AM. This KBR, though, stood for Kushok Bakula Rimpochee, a 19th century Buddhist monk!

The bright, hot Saturday morning welcomed us with a temperature of 18°C. At the airport, our driver was already waiting, holding a placard with my name. We were promptly driven to our hotel, which was neat, tidy, and conveniently close to the Leh Market. The first day was dedicated to acclimatization, essential to avoid altitude sickness. So, we stayed at the hotel, taking it easy. I attended to some office work before calling it a day.

Day 2: July 1, 2024 – Exploring Leh

Our birding guide, Stanzin, arrived at the hotel early in the morning. He was knowledgeable and enthusiastic, ready to share his expertise. We started our day with a gentle walk along the banks of the Indus River. The serene surroundings and the early morning light made for an excellent birding experience.

Eurasian Magpie

We spotted several species, including the elusive Ibisbill, the Carrion Crow, the elegant Eurasian Magpie, the vibrant Bluethroat, and the Citrine Wagtail and Mountain Chiffchaff. These initial sightings were promising and set a positive tone for the rest of our trip.

Bluethroat

Golden Eagle

After a satisfying morning of birding, we returned to the hotel for lunch. The food was a delightful mix of local Ladakhi cuisine and familiar dishes, ensuring we were well-fed and ready for the afternoon adventure. After a short rest, we set off for Hemis National Park, known for its rugged terrain and unique wildlife. The journey to the village of Rumbak within the park was an adventure in itself, with narrow winding roads and stunning mountain vistas.

Tibetan Snowcock

Chukar

Robin Accentor

Bird activity in Hemis was minimal, likely due to the time of day, but we did spot Hill Pigeons, Chukars, Red-billed & Yellow-billed Choughs and Eurasian Magpies. The tranquil surroundings and the beauty of the landscape were rewarding in themselves. We returned to the hotel by 6:00PM, feeling content and ready to rest before our early departure the next day.

White-throated Dipper

Day 3: July 2, 2024 – Journey to Pangong Lake

We started our day early, departing at 5:45AM for Pangong Lake via the Changla Pass (17,688 ft). The journey was long and arduous, but the stunning scenery made it worthwhile.

Early sightings included a magnificent Golden Eagle perched high on a rocky hillside after we passed a place called Sakti Leh, and a little further close to the Zingral Transit Check post we saw the Himalayan Snowcock, the Tibetan Snowcock blending perfectly with the rocky terrain and the Robin Accentor with its cheerful song.

As we drove past the Changla Pass, Stanzin and I saw a silhouette resembling a Dipper on a rock next to the stream and both of us screamed in chorus to stop the vehicle. By the time we stepped out of the car, however, the bird flew away, and we had to scan the stream for about ten minutes before it reappeared – it was the White-throated Dipper! These encounters added to the excitement and anticipation of the journey.

Our next break was at the 'Jab Tak Hai Jaan' place – this place was named after the film. We were thrilled to spot a Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) soaring gracefully in the sky. This sighting was one of the highlights of the day.

We had lunch at the Pangong Lake and then travelled further to our homestay in Merak by 4:30PM. It was a charming and cozy place that offered a warm welcome after a long day of travel.

We about an hour of rest we set out for a birding walk along the shores of Pangong Lake. The lake, with its changing shades of blue and green, was a sight to behold. We spotted several species, including the Great Crested Grebe and the Woolly Hare, which added to the charm of the evening. We stayed out till sunset, hoping to spot the elusive Tibetan Sandgrouse, but luck was not on our side. Other birds we saw today were Chukar, Red-billed Chough, Common Raven, White-winged Redstart and the Black Redstart.

Today was an important day for Prithvi as he attempted his first astrophotography session. Despite some difficulties with camera settings and light pollution, he managed to capture some beautiful shots of the Milky Way, a testament to his growing skills and passion.

Day 4: July 3, 2024 – Exploring Merak and Journey to Hanle

We began our day at 5:30AM, eager to explore the birdlife around Merak. The morning light was perfect for photography, and the crisp air was invigorating. We spotted Tibetan Partridges and a Woolly Hare, which made for an exciting start to the day. We also saw the Himalayan Rubythroat along the bushes on the road side, and a couple of Ruddy Shelducks flying near the shore.

Himalayan Rubythroat

Tibetan Partridge

We had an impressive list of bird sightings today morning in addition to the birds mentioned above: Great Crested Grebe, Hill Pigeon, Eurasian Magpie, Hume's Lark, Eurasian Skylark, Tickell's Leaf Warbler, Black-winged Snowfinch, Twite, Citrine Wagtail and the Common Rosefinch.

Little Owl

Our journey to Hanle was equally rewarding. We saw a Little Owl perched on a wooden pole placed between some boulders on the middle of the road close to the Rezang La Memorial, its large eyes surveying the surroundings.

We stopped at the Rezang La Memorial, a poignant site commemorating the bravery of Indian soldiers who lost their lives fighting the Chinese Army in 1962. The visit was a humbling experience, reminding us of the sacrifices made in this remote and challenging terrain.

Moving past the memorial we saw a pair of Black-necked Cranes in a small wetland. The sun was bright and hot. There was a stretch of road where it resembled a desert. I was stunned to feel hot air blowing through the car window during our travel through this stretch of the road.

Just before entering Hanle we stopped for lunch. The service was very slow – it took us almost an hour! We finally reached our homestay in Hanle at 3:00PM. The place was simple but comfortable. We wasted no time and set out for birding around Hanle. The area was teeming with birdlife.

Eurasian Eagle Owl

We spotted the Eurasian Eagle Owl perched majestically, an Upland Buzzard soaring high and then settling down, the Tibetan Lark singing cheerfully, and the Citrine Wagtail adding a splash of colour to the landscape.

Upland Buzzard

The highlight of the day was undoubtedly the sighting of a Pallas's Cat with four kittens. This elusive and rare species was a thrilling find, and we felt incredibly fortunate to witness such a sight.

Pallas's Cat

That night, despite strong winds, Prithvi managed to capture some excellent shots of the Milky Way, his skills improving with each session.

Day 5: July 4, 2024 - Umling La Pass and Hanle Ecosystem

We added a trip to Umling La Pass to our itinerary. Prithvi was eager to explore one of the highest motorable passes in the world. Departing at 5:30AM, we began our ascent. The journey was challenging, but the stunning views made it worthwhile.

Great Rosefinch

We spotted Great Rosefinches along the way, their vibrant plumage standing out against the rocky terrain. We also saw a pair of Black-necked Cranes with a chick, a heart-warming sight. The Tibetan Gazelle and the Tibetan Wild Ass were also spotted, adding to the day's excitement.

Black-necked Crane pair with chick

After traversing a few kilometres through sandy stretches and some mountainous roads, as soon as we hit the black top road we halted for our packed breakfast. While we were having our breakfast, we had an unusual guest starring at us from a distance, the Tibetan Gazelle.

At around 9:15AM we reached our destination, the Umling La Pass, at 19,024 ft – it was an exhilarating experience. The altimeter marked our ascent, and we felt a sense of accomplishment standing at such a high altitude. The views were breath-taking, with snow-capped peaks and vast expanses of rugged terrain stretching as far as the eye could see. After taking some photos we started our descent.

After returning to Hanle for lunch, we continued birding in the afternoon. We spotted a Jackal in the wetland, its sleek form moving gracefully through the grass.

Common Kestrel

My Concern about the Hanle Ecosystem: A Fragile Paradise

Hanle is a unique ecosystem characterized by its high-altitude wetlands, which support a variety of bird species and other wildlife. However, rapid urbanization poses a significant threat to this delicate environment. The influx of tourists, primarily drawn by the Umling La Pass, has led to the proliferation of homestays and infrastructure development. Roads cutting through wetlands isolate pockets of habitat, endangering the species that rely on this fragile ecosystem. If unchecked, this urbanization could irreparably damage Hanle's wetlands, leading to the loss of many unique species.

The wetlands in Hanle are a crucial habitat for several bird species, including the Black-necked Crane, which is listed as vulnerable. These wetlands provide nesting and feeding grounds for these birds, making them vital for their survival. The wetlands are also home to other species like the Pallas's Cat, Tibetan Gazelle, and various migratory birds. The delicate balance of this ecosystem is threatened by human activities, and urgent conservation efforts are needed to protect it.

Day 6: July 5, 2024 – Journey to Tsokar

We departed Hanle after breakfast, filled with memories of the incredible wildlife we had seen. Our first stop was near Loma, where Stanzin spotted a Brown Accentor, a bird we had not yet seen on this trip.

Brown Accentor

We continued our journey, passing through the villages of Nyoma and Mahe before reaching the geothermal area near Puga. The geothermal activity in this region is fascinating, with hot springs and steam vents dotting the landscape.

Tibetan Sandgrouse

We arrived at Tsokar in the late afternoon. The high-altitude lake, also known as the ‘White Lake’ due to the salt deposits on its shores, is a haven for birdwatchers. We spotted many birds here: Tibetan Sandgrouse, Blanford's Snowfinches, Bar-headed Geese, Brown-headed Gulls, Great Crested Grebe, Red-eared (aka Black-necked) Grebe, Tibetan Sand Plover and Common Redshank.

Ground Tit

Horned Lark

The Ground Tit, Horned Lark, Desert Wheatear, Black-winged Snowfinch, Black-necked Crane, Northern Pintail, Eurasian Wigeon, and Eurasian Coot were also seen. The variety of bird species in this area was astounding, and we spent the evening spotting them through the scope as the birds were deep inside the lake far away from the shore.

As the sun set, painting the sky with hues of orange and pink, we called it a day and returned to our homestay. That night, Prithvi hoped for clear skies to continue his astrophotography, but the weather was cloudy, and he had to postpone his session.

Day 7: July 6, 2024 – Return to Leh

We woke up to a stunning sight of the mountain peaks covered with snow. It had been drizzling in Tsokar during the night, and it was snowing on the mountain peaks, creating a beautiful contrast to the previous evening's landscape. The snow-capped mountains glistened in the morning light, adding a magical touch to our last day in the highlands.

Departing Tsokar at 7:00AM, we made our way back to Leh. The journey took us through the Taglangla Pass (17,482 ft), one of the highest passes in the region. The steep descent from the pass was challenging, but our driver navigated it skillfully. We joined the Leh-Manali Highway and arrived in Leh by early afternoon.

Back in Leh, we had some time to explore the local market and buy some souvenirs. The bustling market offered a variety of handicrafts, textiles, and local products, and we enjoyed immersing ourselves in the vibrant atmosphere.

We thanked Stanzin and our driver for their excellent guidance and patience throughout the trip. Their knowledge and expertise had made our journey enjoyable and enriching.

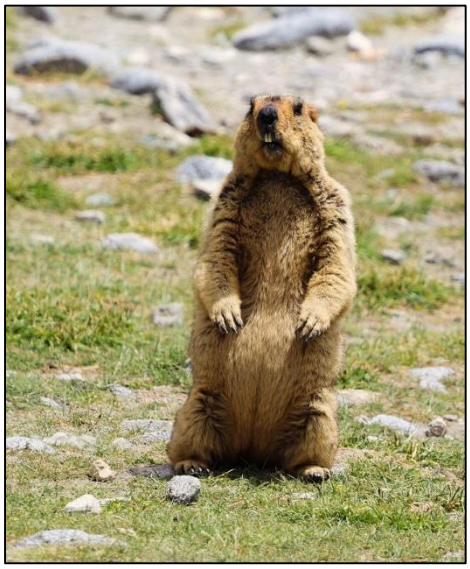
Conclusion

Our Leh trip was a remarkable blend of birding and astrophotography. Despite the challenges posed by rapid urbanization, the region's breath-taking beauty and biodiversity left us with unforgettable memories. Special thanks to Mr Lobzang for arranging such a meticulously planned and enriching experience.

In contrast to my expectation of experiencing very cold temperatures, the temperature was pretty warm and, except for some low temperatures at night, the entire trip was pretty warm.

The journey had been a perfect mix of adventure, relaxation, and learning. We had witnessed some of the most beautiful landscapes and unique wildlife that Ladakh has to offer. The memories of this trip will stay with us forever, reminding us of the beauty and fragility of nature.

Prithvi's interest in astrophotography had grown, and he was eager to continue exploring this new hobby. The trip had also deepened our appreciation for birdwatching and conservation. As a family, the trip brought us closer together. We returned home with a renewed sense of wonder and a commitment to continue exploring and preserving the natural world.



Himalayan Marmot

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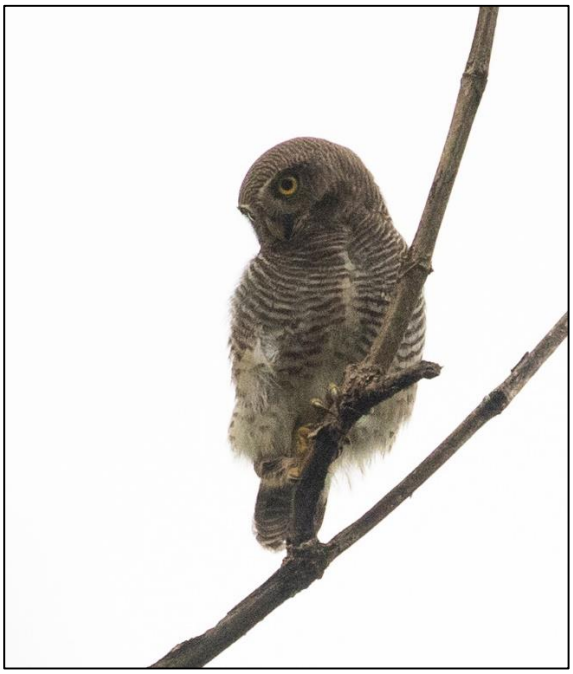
Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Jungle Owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*)



Jungle Owlet (Dandeli, Karnataka, October 30, 2024)

Order:	Strigiformes
Family:	Strigidae
Genus:	*Galucidium*
Species:	*G. radiatum*
Size:	20 cm

Description & distribution: The Jungle Owlet, also known as Barred Jungle Owlet, is a small owlet with a round head and fine brown barring all over. It does not have a clearly demarcated facial disk. Upperparts are dark black-brown with white barring, Wing coverts have white and rufous patches, while the primaries and secondaries are dark brown with paler chestnut barring. Underparts are whitish or pale rufous with dark barring. The chin, upper breast and centre of the abdomen show a whitish patch. It has bright yellow irises, dark bill and tarsi with black claws. The sexes are alike. It is a widespread resident, with its range extending patchily from Himachal Pradesh east to Bhutan, and south across the Indian plains, with another subspecies inhabiting the Western Ghats. It is unrecorded in Rajasthan and adjoining arid areas; it is also not seen in the North East, where it is replaced by the Asian Barred Owlet. Two subspecies are recognized – the nominate, *G. radiatum*, is seen in the plains of India and Sri Lanka, whereas *G. r. malabaricum*, seen in the Western Ghats, has a shorter tail and shows more brown on the head; it is possible that the Western Ghats subspecies may be elevated to a full species status in future.

Habitat & behaviour: The Jungle Owlet is usually seen singly or in pairs or, occasionally, small groups, and is usually found by its calls at dusk or dawn. Its preferred habitat is scrub forest, open deciduous and moist deciduous forests, and mixed teak and bamboo forests. It is largely crepuscular and nocturnal, but does not seem to be much inconvenienced by sunlight, and is often seen moving around in the daytime. Its call is a loud *kao-kao-kao*, followed by *kao-kuk, kao-kuk, kao-kuk*, increasing in tempo and then fading in volume before stopping abruptly. Nestlings produce *tick* calls that sound like the Pale-billed Flowerpecker. The Jungle Owlet is often mobbed by Drongos, Treepies and Sunbirds while at the daytime roost, and maybe as a result, prefers to roost inside tree cavities. It is often seen on open wires or branches, basking in the sun before moving to the daytime roost. Its diet consists mainly of insects, small birds, reptiles and rodents. Its peak foraging time is one hour before sunrise or after sunset, but it has been known to capture *Phylloscopus* warblers during the day also.

Nesting: The Jungle Owlet breeds mainly between March and May. It in natural tree hollows, usually unlined, and located between 3-5 metres from the ground. The usual clutch consists of four roundish eggs (three in *G. r. malabaricum*).

Local name: The Jungle Owlet is known as *'Jangli choghad'* or *'Kala khusat'* in Hindi, *'Chhota kalpencha'* in Bengali, *'Van chibri'* in Gujarati, *'Sinna andai'* in Tamil, *'Chemban nathu'* in Malayalam, and *'Adavi pagadigante'* in Telugu.

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